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## ABSTRACT

State education agencies (SEA's) must determine the policies most appropriate for the realization at the state level of the high priority placed on international education by the new U.S. Department of Education. The extent of international education (whether involving the study of different cultures, of foreign languages, of nations and international relations, or of some combination of these) must first be defined. SEA's can then establish statewide goals and provide consultative help and technical assistance to local education agencies as they make their decisions regarding the placement of international education in the curriculum or in district policy. Despite the priority placed on international education, however, available financial support remains limited. Some sources of further information on state-level programs in international education conclude this document. (Author/PGD)

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## STATE EDUCATION AGENCY INVOLVEMENT IN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

### An Issue Analysis Paper

Prepared for the Chief State School Officers  
of the States of Alaska, Hawaii,  
Idaho, Oregon, Montana and Washington

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# STATE EDUCATION AGENCY INVOLVEMENT IN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

## An Issue Analysis Paper

### INTRODUCTION

Reports from the U. S. Department of Education indicate rather clearly that "international education" will be one of the priority concerns of the new department. What is not so clear is what is meant by this very general--one might say global--term. Nearly everybody, except perhaps the most thorough going xenophobe, professes to be in favor of greater international understanding and more effective international education, but once we get beyond the general endorsement of the concept, some very practical problems emerge. What exactly is meant by "international education," a term widely used but not clearly or consistently defined? Once a working definition is formulated and accepted, what program options do schools have? And once appropriate programs are devised what general directions can they take--more specifically, how can they be directed toward the desired ends of the curriculum and of the educational program as a whole?

These questions may sound simply rhetorical, but they are really very practical ones. Before international education can become a new thrust or a central priority, the issues of definition, program, and directions will have to be resolved.

## I. DIMENSIONS AND DEFINITIONS OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

The potentially most useful definitions of international education emerge not from abstract analysis of the field, but from identification of the kinds of emphases actually found in programs that have as their intent the furthering or advancement of international understanding as part of the curriculum the public school system. Three of the most common of these emphases are identified and briefly described below:

A. Study of Different Cultures. The most common, pervasive, and widely distributed approach to international education found in the schools is what might be called the cultural approach. Even in the very early grades, conscious effort is very frequently made to help students develop an interest in and appreciation of other cultures. When done well, this can be a very worthwhile--though ultimately rather limited--approach. It can go far beyond teaching a rather self-righteous "tolerance" of different cultures; it seeks to engender a real appreciation of cultural differences as found not only within the context of our own time and our own country, but in other times and other countries as well.

The frequent charge that such programs tend to be superficial and a bit patronizing--the dutch-wear-wooden-shoes and Indians-live-in-tepees cliches--is probably no longer a valid criticism. Taught by conscientious and sensitive teachers, supported by a good variety of appropriate curricular materials, and enriched with a wide range of appropriate class activities, these culture-based approaches can capitalize on the natural curiosity of children and youth about how other people live and can result in developing a very real (if rather limited) appreciation of the rich diversity to be found among

the peoples of the earth. Studying various cultures in all of their varied manifestations can be readily integrated into the regular curricular areas—the language arts, the social studies, and especially the visual and performing arts.

The limitation of the "cultures" approach lies in its emphasis on the peoples of the world rather than the nations of the world. It provides a significant contribution to, but not a substitute for, truly international education.

B. Study of Languages In its recently published report, culminating many months of intensive work by a distinguished group of scholars, The Presidential Commission on the Study of Foreign Languages unequivocally recommended a major increase in the scope and extent of foreign language instruction as the surest route to increased international understanding.

The case made by this thoughtful report appears to be, in its basic reasoning, almost incontrovertible. A person—and a nation—remaining imprisoned in just one language can scarcely be expected fully to appreciate and understand other peoples of the world, and any significant communication between persons who don't speak each other's language is severely limited. The problem of language barriers is worldwide, of course, but America seems to lag behind most of the other developed nations in its attempt to break this barrier by providing systematic and sustained study of foreign languages in the schools.

The study of languages can build upon the study of cultures to provide better understanding of the peoples of the earth. In fact, a good case could be made for the contention that one can't really understand a culture—despite some exposure to its traditions, its

myths, its music, and its foods—without being able to converse in the language, which is the ultimate embodiment of all that is most significant in any culture.

Thus, a convincing argument can be made that the most significant route to international understanding is through languages, studied not casually for a year or two as an elective, but as an integral and indepth part of the regular required curriculum. But there are a couple of problems with this viewpoint.

The first is that foreign language study, as it is usually conducted in the schools of the United States, does not ordinarily move the student beyond the rudiments of an imperfectly understood vocabulary and a seldom-mastered grammar. Thus, few students are sufficiently motivated—or linguistically competent—to see any connection between the formal language study and a real understanding of the people of another nation.

The second problem with the language-based approach is that languages per se, or at best language as a part of a culture, become the major emphasis; little attention is given to the nations in which these languages are spoken. Therefore, to consider languages as an integral part of understanding peoples makes good sense; such language study does little, however, to further understanding of nations.

C. Study of Nations. Approaching international education through the study of cultures or the study of languages or a combination of the two is widespread in our schools, and at its best is commendable and at least marginally effective. But neither culture nor language defines a nation; nations are essentially de facto political/economic entities which may or may not be

comprised of a single identifiable linguistic or cultural grouping. More likely, nations combine a number of often discrete ethnic, language, and culture groupings which have coalesced into something called a "nation" for a variety of complex and even obscure historical reasons.

Since international education has as its central purpose the increasing of understanding and mutual respect among nations, to the ultimate end of reducing inter-nation conflict and strengthening inter-nation cooperation, the unit which is central to international education is the nation, not the culture or the language.

Therefore, it seems rather surprising that the dimension of international education which appears to have received the least attention in schools is that of studying the political/economic reality which we call a "nation." Unless national purposes, goals, frustrations—and even hangups—can be identified and understood, there seems little reason to believe that inter-nation understanding can be effectively advanced.

In schools, concentrating on the nation itself as the unit for the study of international problems has been limited primarily to the secondary level, and with perhaps good reason. It takes a certain level of maturity and sophistication—as well as a modicum of background in history and the other social sciences—for a student to begin to understand the causes and extent of the national aspirations which bring about international conflict (or under the most favorable of circumstances, international cooperation). Yet a good case could be made for the contention that at any grade level, appropriate and effective emphasis could be given to at least a rudimentary understanding of some of the root causes of conflicts between nations

and some of the hopeful signs that nations are beginning to learn to give up some of their own nationalistic interests in pursuit of common international goals. (Just as examples, international agreements covering peaceful uses of outer space, preservation of endangered species, and advanced-nation help to developing countries are all topics which could profitably be explored in all but perhaps the earliest grades.)

## II. PROGRAM/ACTIVITY AREAS IN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

The content and program of school curriculum is one of those educational matters which puts to the test the commonly accepted doctrine that education, while primarily a state responsibility, must at the same time be responsive to national priorities and yet remain operationally in the domain of a locally elected board of education. This three-way division of ultimate responsibility for curriculum, and particularly for curriculum changes, puts the state education agency in a ticklish position.

If international education is to develop as one of the national priorities of education, as enunciated by the new Department of Education, the SEA will want to respond appropriately; better yet, the SEA will doubtless want to anticipate the problems and opportunities which may be encountered, and get its own programs established in advance of federal determinations. The state, for example, may quite possibly choose to mandate the inclusion of international education in the curriculum and enforce that mandate through accreditation standards, graduation requirements or other appropriate means.

However, the determination of the specific form in which international education will actually appear in the curriculum will generally be a local-district determination. To help make that local decision as wise a one as possible, and to offer the consultative help and technical assistance appropriate to effective curriculum organization and instructional strategies, the SEA will find itself reviewing the most likely contexts in which international education may be offered at the local-district level. The formal curriculum, the co-curricular activities, and certain local-district policy/practice areas seem to constitute the most common avenues of approach to international education.

A. Formal Curriculum. Only at the secondary level, and then only in the largest schools with the most comprehensive offerings, are there likely to be found full courses with any sort of international-education label. Mini-courses, in schools offering such a curricular arrangement, are a far more likely way to get some of the concepts and content of international education introduced into the formal course of study. The most common way of including international concerns in the regular curriculum, especially at the elementary level, is through special short-term "units" on selected countries, cultures, or problems, attached to or embedded in regular social studies courses. International concerns can also be worked into courses in almost any field and taught "incidentally," but like most things intended to be taught in only an incidental fashion, coverage usually ranges from skimpy to nonexistent.

B. Co-curricular Activities. Activities linked to but not a part of the regular curriculum have often proved to be good entry-points for international education concerns. Music, art, drama, dance--all of these activities can make extensive use of materials derived from

other cultures, and in the process serve as a general introduction to those cultures. International education clubs, often utilizing some sort of mock-UN or similar role-playing activity, can heighten student awareness not only of other cultures but of other political and economic systems as well. Some of the school activities discussed in the next section of this paper, requiring policy decisions on the part of the school administration and the local board--for example, study and faculty exchange programs--can also be successfully linked to a wide variety of co-curricular activities.

C. Policy/Structure Areas. A good many of the most fruitful ways of introducing--or embedding--international education into the school curriculum require board/administration determination to establish fundamental school policy and perhaps to undertake some structural accommodations to make the programs work. One major example of activities of this type is the school-to-school program sponsored by the Office of Overseas Schools in the U.S. Department of State (ultimately to be transferred to the Department of Education) and the Association for the Advancement of International Education. In this program, the local board must adopt policies and make some financial commitments which result in the local school districts being "paired" with an American-sponsored school overseas. In this linking arrangement, teachers (and sometimes administrators) are exchanged, student exchanges are worked out, and instructional materials and technical assistance are provided from the U.S. school to its partner school overseas. Some 125 of these "linkages" are now in operation, a number of them in the states of the Northwest region. (See "For Further Information" note at the close of this paper.)

Student exchanges, under the auspices of any number of reputable and responsible organizations, have brought to many students both here and abroad a firsthand chance to become, for a time, a participant in another culture. The benefits of these programs, of course, go far beyond those accruing only to the students who directly participate; the whole student body of the school may share profitably in this experience. (However, programs offered commercially by travel-study marketing firms often entail potential problems: see ("International Education Guidelines" in The School Administrator, Vol. 37, No. 7, pp. 28-29, July-August, 1980.)

Faculty exchanges frequently get a little more complicated because of overly restrictive state laws regarding teacher certification and the absence of adequate guarantee of continuous retirement rights for the stateside teacher who elects to take an overseas assignment. These are essentially technical problems that can be and are being worked out by individual states, but current regulations do often inhibit unnecessarily the very desirable exchange of teachers between countries.

Visiting speakers representing foreign cultures and countries can usually be brought in for one-shot classroom appearances without any particular trouble, although clear local-board policies covering such activities are needed to avoid confusion and possible negative public reaction.

Special school sponsored "weeks"—U.N. week, or International Affairs Week, for example—offer another way to given international education visibility and legitimacy in the curriculum. Such major undertakings, of course, again require both local-board policy

approval and certain scheduling and logistical adjustments which involve administrative approval and total-faculty cooperation.

Sometimes, statewide organizations devoted to the advancement of special concerns related to international education can play a productive role in promoting the cause of international understanding in the schools. Working with an "outside" organization always provides a certain number of administrative headaches, but it might be argued that it is better to cooperate with existing organizations--teachers of foreign languages, international clubs, Anglo-American or other "friendship" groups, and special ethnic-heritage groups--than to set up another, perhaps cumbersome, organization to promote international education concerns in the schools.

### III. POSSIBLE FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This brief paper has been, of necessity, essentially future-oriented; most of what appears to be valuable in promoting international education is not now generally happening, except on a small scale and in relatively isolated instances. The options that are open are wide open!

Therefore, little more needs to be said at this point about programs as such, either generally or as they relate to state education agencies specifically. But a couple of special comments about future directions should be made.

First, no matter what any office, organization, institution or group says about the importance of international education, there is very little reason to believe that anybody is talking about putting up substantial sums of program money. The much-praised International Education Act passed by Congress more than a decade ago was never funded, and has now

passed into oblivion. Given the current and foreseeable economic state of our country, international education is not likely to be anything more than a do-it-yourself project for state and local education authorities.

Second, nearly everybody who is not xenophobic is theoretically in favor of international understanding and cooperation as the best possible preventive of future international tensions and armed conflicts. By implication, this same mass of people should be ardent supporters of international education. Sadly, this is not the case. International education has a great potential clientele, but it has almost no identifiable constituency clamoring for action. The voters—at local, state, or national level—show no signs of coming out in droves to support the cause. The "national priority" status of international education is one which has been assigned by those already convinced of the rightness and importance of their cause. There is no thundering noise—not even much of a murmur—from the grassroots.

Despair, however, is not in order. International education is important, and its importance is being slowly but increasingly recognized. A great deal of good work is being done—low-cost and low-key, but it is being done at both local and state education levels. Thus, the potential for effective state leadership is great.

#### For Further Information

The Council of Chief State School Officers has for many years had a strong and sustained interest in international education, maintaining a standing committee on the topic, participating in occasional funded projects in the area, and publishing periodic reports on the status of international education in several states.

The Education Commission of the States has not recently evidenced so active an interest, because of other priority commitments; however, their 1969 publication, State Leadership in International Education (Report #14, 84 pages), authored by Ward Morehouse and edited by the present writer, remains a useful state-by-state compendium of possible SEA activities in promoting international education.

The School-to-School program, partially supported by the Office of Overseas Schools of the Department of State (Dr. Ernest Manino, Director; phone 703/235-9600) and administered in cooperation with the Association for the Advancement of International Education (Dr. Floyd Parsons, Executive Director; phone 501/225-4933), provides excellent examples of both LEA and SEA involvement.

A number of state education agencies--but a relatively few, overall--have significant programs in international education. No attempt has been made in this brief analysis to survey all of the SEA's or to identify the leading programs, but the SEA activities in Utah, Minnesota, and North Carolina are frequently and very favorably mentioned by persons familiar with the field.